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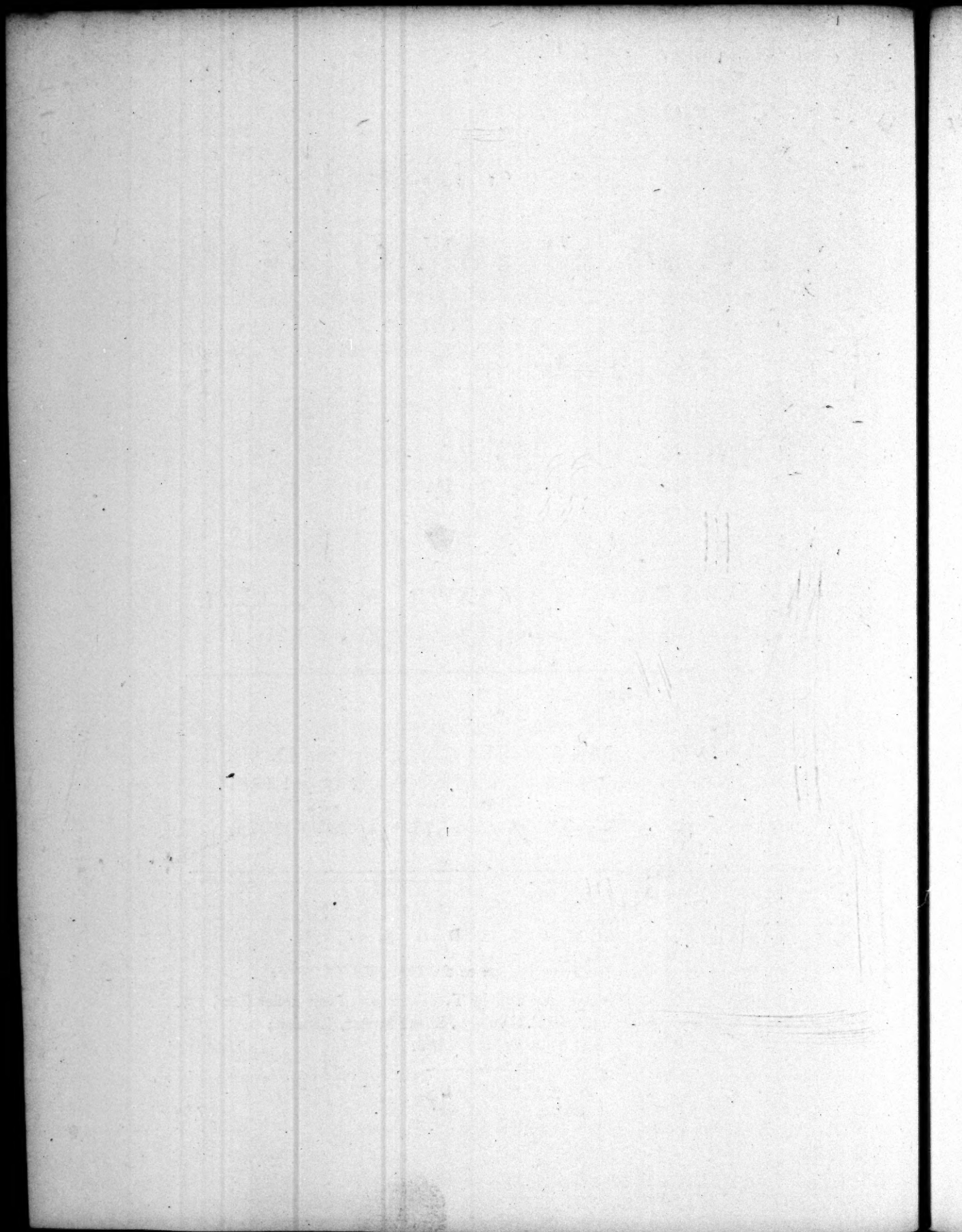
A
S E R M O N
PREACHED AT THE
V I S I T A T I O N
HELD AT
CHURCH STRETTON,
ON
THURSDAY MAY XVIII, M.DCC.LXXVI.

BY
JOHN MAINWARING, B. D.
RECTOR OF CHURCH STRETTON, SHROPSHIRE;
AND
FELLOW OF ST. JOHN'S COLLEGE CAMBRIDGE.

C A M B R I D G E,

Printed by J. ARCHDEACON Printer to the UNIVERSITY;
For J. WOODYER, in Cambridge; and sold by T. BEECROFT, Pater noster Row,
B. WHITE, Fleetstreet, and T. CADELL, in the Strand, London;
and D. PRINCE, at Oxford,

MDCCLXXVI.



TO THE REVEREND
ROBERT CLIVE, M. A.

ARCHDEACON OF SALOP,

AND TO THE
REVEREND CLERGY
BEFORE WHOM IT WAS PREACHED,

THE FOLLOWING

S E R M O N

IS

MOST HUMBL Y INSCRIBED.

TO THE REVEREND

ROBERT CLIVE,

ARCHDEACON OF SALOP.

DEAR SIR,

IF there is any imprudence in offering to the Public the following Discourse, a desire to comply with the request which You and the Clergy have done me the honour to make, is my only apology. The Subject is certainly well suited to the Occasion. In the
manner

manner of treating it, there may be some things liable to exception. My pen was guided by my feelings: and the sentiments which flow from the heart will not submit to the restraints which fashion imposes. Reserve and disguise were as foreign to my design, as they are to my nature. I hope however that nothing will be found in these pages, which betrays an affectation of singularity, or even the slightest disregard to the rules of decorum. If so, the zeal of a writer, anxious for the honour of his sacred profession; and, in touching the causes of its degradation, alike unwilling to offend, or sacrifice truth to the fear of offending, may atone for some faults. The Public, I trust, will readily forgive them. And if some few persons should mistake my motives in lamenting the condition of the Clergy, considered as a body, it will be but natural. Easy in their own fortunes, and extremely patient under the distresses of their brethren, they may impute my concern

cern to discontent, or disappointment. They may see things in a different light, and may fancy, or affect to believe, that I have purposely represented them worse than they are. Such accidents, how unpleasant soever, would be amply compensated by the happy opportunity of giving You this public testimony of my esteem and affection. But this Letter is not written for the usual purpose of conveying compliments. *Your* character will speak for itself. Esteemed and beloved as You are by all your acquaintance, especially those with whom You have a nearer connection, it needs no eulogiums of mine. Besides that, in friendships like our's, formality can have no place. We were educated together in the same University and College, were admitted of the same Year, were placed under the care of the same Tutors, and studied together in the same Apartment. The attachment, which commenced so early, neither time nor absence has diminished.

Indeed,

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Indeed, friendships like our's are not formed of
perishing materials.

I am,

Dear Sir,

Your obliged and affectionate Servant,

J. MAINWARING.

VISITATION SERMON.

MARK IX. latter part of verse 50.

HAVE SALT IN YOURSELVES, AND HAVE PEACE ONE
WITH ANOTHER.

THESE words refer to a previous conversation of our Lord with his disciples. Some incidents which arose in the course of that conference, had prevented his giving them the whole of his mind on the matter in debate. But he returned to the subject before he dismissed them; and the emphatical advice, with which the chapter concludes, is the full and final result of his sentiments on that occasion. His life was one continued lesson of humility. His discourses had incessantly inculcated the same virtue. Yet he finds them disputing, like mere earthly embassadors, the point of precedence; contending with warmth, who should be foremost, not in merit, but in rank; ambitious of distinctions vain and fantastic; which, instead of improving the mind and heart, defeat the designs of nature by impairing it's best affections; in-

stead of uniting men in one common interest, as congenial creatures, connected and endeared by mutual ties; heirs of the same promises, and servants of the same Lord,—are often destructive of benevolence and piety.

To guard against such errors in persons appointed to explain and enforce the rule of conduct, our Lord urges the necessity of self-denial under the strongest emblems, images, and figures. “For every one, says he, shall be salted with fire, and every sacrifice shall be salted with salt.” Every one, devoted like you, to the service of God, shall suffer affliction; and every one, whom God will accept, must be cleansed by suffering, as victims were sanctified by salt. “Have salt in yourselves.” Be ever mindful of your polluted origin and probationary State. Purify your own hearts. Subdue your own passions.

Such was the occasion, and immediate import of our Saviour’s advice. But it also admits of another interpretation, which applies it to the head, as well as to the heart; and this sense deserves our attention, because it renders the precept more useful and extensive.

It is not unusual for emblems to point at more truths than one. Like parables, and prophetic sayings, they have often a latent and mystical, as well as a more direct and evident sense. Thus salt is as proper a symbol of penetration and discernment, as of sanctification and purity. Nor will such an interpretation seem at all forced, when we observe how well it corresponds

responds to the genius of the antient languages, in which that term denotes the endowments of the mind with peculiar elegance and energy. St. Matthew, and St. Luke, on the very subject before us, both use the same remarkable form of expression, *ἔαν δὲ τὸ ἄλλας μωρανθῇ*, si vero sal desipuerit, vel infatuetur, — a curious instance of a metaphor turned both ways; on one side, foolishness being ascribed to matter; on the other, matter being made to represent the qualities of mind. But what are the qualities here intended? Certainly those, which are opposed to foolishness, — reason and good sense.

“ Let your conversation, says St. Paul, be seasoned with salt;” i. e. let it be wise and discreet, — the reason he immediately adds, — “ that you may know how to give an answer to every one” — to those, who are unacquainted with the faith; to those who deny; and those who betray it; — to the untutored Heathen, the unbelieving Jew, and the Judaizing Christian: — an answer, ready, and suited to the occasion, whatever it may be; such as may satisfy the scruples of the ingenuous inquirer, or silence the cavils of the vain disputer; may, at all events, preserve inviolate the honour of your religion, yet without provoking bad men to extremities; or, exposing your own persons to needless hazard, in these perilous times.

Instances of this application of the term may be met with in so many authors both Greek and Latin, that out of respect

to so learned an audience, I forbear to produce them. I will only observe, that, as it was our Lord's main design equally to guard his disciples against error and corruption; the precept, if considered in this double view, will be more consistent with it. For if our sentiments of religion are not founded upon reason, the purest intentions may be ill directed, and the mischiefs of error overlooked or approved through the merit of the principle with which it is associated.

That religion, which required men to sacrifice their children to Dæmons, was the more destructive, in proportion to the sincerity of it's votaries. Instead of opposing the laws of their country, and customs of their ancestors, as truth required, men the most eminent for piety, went farthest into the delusion, performing with all the zeal of duty, acts, at which savages would shudder. What it was, that delivered us from a system, in which virtue itself was baneful, and the value of that deliverance, I leave to the reflection of our infidel philosophers.

To all, who *admit* revelation, the earlier part of St. Paul's life is an example, of what importance it is, to found religion upon reason. His zeal, so long as it was guided by opinion, fermented into fury; — that zeal, which when better informed, subsided into pure benevolence, and prompted him to sacrifice his ease and safety, and every thing, which he held most dear, could he but secure the salvation of his hapless, unbelieving brethren.

Among

Among the examples of this sort, are those early Christians, whose zeal in the work of conversion incited them to acts of compliance, irreconcilable with evangelical truth:—those fathers of the Church, who, in subsequent times, to silence adversaries, had recourse to the mean expedients of artifice and fraud;—those princes of Christendom, who, from a devout, but mistaken principle, exhausted their strength in an enterprize equally disastrous, and ill concerted; who, to recover the country, which God had forsaken, depopulated their own dominions; and carried desolation through a vast extent of climate, without procuring the least advantage to the Christian cause.

Nor are instances wanting in our own times of the mischief arising from an ill-informed zeal. Some have written volumes with a view to religious improvement, which overthrow the obligations to morality. Others have magnified moral attainments, as sufficient for all the purposes of man; have dwelt on the amiableness of virtue, the dignity of human nature, and the fitness of things, until they have lost almost all recollection of our fallen state, and of the great plan, which infinite mercy hath established for our recovery. Others again have maintained such opinions concerning grace, and election, as leave not the least room for liberty, or personal righteousness.

“Salt is good,” says our Lord, probably with an eye to all those evils, which the world would one day experience from a

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corrupted Church, and the Church from it's own teachers and governors. As if he had said, — The religion you are commissioned to publish, and qualified to teach, if fairly proposed, will recommend *itself*, every way agreeable as it is to the nature of man; alike fitted to enlarge and exalt the understanding, — to correct and purify the passions and affections. It is also recommended by numerous and clear demonstrations of a divine origin. Yet, after all, the success of this religion must depend on mere human instruments and means. For God accomplishes the ends of his mercy by the intervention of men; and those, who, by their good dispositions, are the fittest for his purpose, and the most favoured besides with his gifts and graces, are still subject to the assaults of passion; still fallible and frail. “ But if the salt have lost it's saltness, wherewith shall it be seasoned?” If you, who should instruct and reform the world, should yourselves be convicted of *faults*, or *mistakes*, to whom will you apply for instruction, or correction? I never have deceived you. Do not then delude one another with false notions of greatness, or importance, ease or indulgence. If vainly trusting to your own abilities, you forget to implore that aid, which alone can prosper your endeavours; or, neglecting the improvement of your natural powers, and the plain information which they afford, you expect to be guided perpetually by impulses and inspirations, you *mistake* the business in which you are engaged. If your engaging in it, was not the result of reflection and choice; if
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that zeal, which first prompted, and still supports you, should languish in the hour of trial; if you, who should lead others to perfection, are virtuous but by halves; — if you are austere, or ostentatious, or interested; — such *faults* will be fatal: nor will there be found in the abundant resources of wisdom and goodness any further relief.

Having sufficiently enlarged on the two senses, which are included in the first part of the precept, I have only to add, that the admonition, though addressed to the disciples, and immediate followers of our Saviour, is applicable to the public state of religion in every period; and is so peculiarly suited to the Clergy of this age and country, that one would almost imagine it had an express reference to them.

From the nature of Church preferment, most of them are dependent on the wealthier part of the people, or on persons in power. The former, if they were more disposed to encourage merit, are not often very competent judges of it; and the latter, even when *qualified* to distinguish, and *desirous* to reward it, are usually restrained by motives of Policy. The desire of excelling must depend on the regard which is paid to excellence; and in *other* professions, it is raised and supported by the hopes of success. But what are the preacher's hopes? There *are* but two roads that lead to eminence — popularity, and court-favour; and, to speak ingenuously, the footsteps of virtue are seldom to be traced in either. The fortunes of the Clergy have been as singular, as their situation is perilous. It

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should seem indeed, as if, by some strange fatality, they were destined to be the authors of oppression, or the objects of it. When the learning of the nation was chiefly confined to this order, it is not very strange that the chief direction of the public affairs was entrusted to it. But the ill effects of so close a connection between the throne and the altar, were soon seen by the doctrines which they taught—by the system of tyranny, which they planned and executed. The revival of learning ensued; or perhaps we ourselves had been tutored in that school; trained to defend and propagate opinions, which subvert all civil and religious rights; leagued in the support of that spiritual oppression, to which a great part of Europe is still subject. But the Salt, which seemed for ever to have lost, by the blessing of God, recovered it's favour. If the Clergy of an earlier period introduced and established such evils, those of succeeding times were among the first to oppose them at the hazard of their lives and fortunes. It is to the firm zeal, the fearless virtue of our predecessors, this nation is chiefly indebted for it's deliverance. The Clergy of a later date, by their diligence and talents have secured, and improved the blessing;—an obligation, which, when time shall have abated the force of prejudice, impartial posterity may be willing to acknowledge.

Subordinations are as necessary in religious societies, as in any other; and the advantages allotted to the Clergy may differ both in kind and degree.

Every

Every friend to religion must wish to see the governors of the Church in circumstances, which may render them secure and independent; in a rank as respectable, as their office is important. But what good effects can possibly arise from an extreme disparity between persons of the same profession; all educated alike, all invested with a public trust, and directing their labours to one common end?

When the civil authority thought fit to reduce those enormous revenues, which the superstition of the times had assigned to the Church, it should at least have supported the credit of religion: in mere prudence, as well as mercy, should have secured a subsistence to the meanest of its officers; and not have suffered any part of an order, which itself had instituted, and every government hath found necessary, to become destitute. This situation, whether owing to the deficiency, or distribution of the public maintenance, hinders the greater part from exerting, or improving their abilities; renders some of the ablest among them unserviceable and insignificant; reducing them to a dependance on those very persons, who should acknowledge their authority; who should receive from them advice and instruction—perhaps admonition and reproof. Nay, if they execute their commission with that sincerity and freedom, which becomes their character; if they escape the faults, to which their indigence exposes them, and are endued besides with every human excellence;—impossible it must still be, in the present course of things, to maintain the contest of

mere merit against the band of base and powerful opponents. While numbers around them of the lowest class are sharers in that affluence an extended trade diffuses; — excluded from every advantage, which industry can procure to others; compelled to renounce their * rights, or ruined in the prosecution of them; if they find means to subsist themselves, what can they bequeath to their children? — Instruction, and example. True: But a liberal education, by refining the passions and sentiments, in some degree softens the mind, and forms it to habits of higher delicacy — habits, which, in a condition at all corresponding to them, are proper and desirable; but which double the distresses of contempt and poverty. Such a reflection might almost extinguish the honest ambition of raising their children above the level of the unfeeling vulgar, whose ignorance, if it exposes them to some inconveniences, is a defence and protection against others, that are greater.

Admitting the truth of the foregoing observations, what is
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* There never was a country more famous than our own for the impartial administration of justice, nor is there any period in our annals more deserving of this praise than the present. The dues of the Clergy are as well guarded by the laws, as those of any other subjects, but till of late have not been so well ascertained. For this reason they have been more frequently disputed, and probably will be so, for other reasons, not likely to be removed. The mode of collecting them is obnoxious; and the selfish spirit, which prevails so generally, considers them as a tax, annually levied on the industry of the people. When disputes arise, such are the difficulties which usually attend the methods of obtaining redress, that it is wiser to submit to oppression, than to pursue them. A person of great worth and eminence, who long presided in the Court of Exchequer, and has lately retired, lamented this hardship of the Clergy, and discouraged to the utmost of his power all attempts to injure or disturb them in their just claims or possessions. The church and the nation have equal reason to acknowledge his services; and to see them rewarded by such distinguished marks of his Sovereign's regard, must be very pleasing to all but those, who never are pleased with the government they live under, or the age they live in.

the intent of them? Is it to deter the serious and sensible part of our youth from entering into orders? No: but to prevent those, who do, from deceiving themselves,—by expecting better fortune than is likely to befall them. From the enemies of religion they must expect ill treatment, as a thing of course, and perhaps too from some, who would be thought it's friends. However, as men of sense and character will always be inclined to espouse the Clergy, were it only from a regard to their education and employment; so they themselves, by their own merit may shame those, who will allow no merit to their office;—still discharging the duties of their station with a zeal proportioned to the difficulties of it;—not abating their ardour in the pursuit of learning, because the rewards of it are uncertain; not lowering the dignity of their profession, because the repute of it is lessened; but by their generous perseverance adding honour to both; as indeed, how much soever the public opinion may vary, the value and importance of both will be always the same. For the experience of the best ages sufficiently shews, that the purity of the Church is not inconsistent with the distresses of it's ministers. And though the continuance of such distresses in quiet times, and under well ordered governments, be injurious to the faith, and matter of triumph to it's enemies; yet until they can be removed or mitigated in a legal way, the sufferers will wait with patience, firmly persuaded, that God will not desert his purposes, and best knows when to complete them.

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There is a further use in the foregoing observations, which respects the *laity*. For they shew, contrary to the opinion of the world, that the advantages of our condition are not such, as, in any view, entitle us to their envy and resentment.

They may also serve to remind *parents* in general, and especially those, to whom a numerous family affords a liberty of choice, to consult the temper and talents of their children, instead of yielding to fanciful inducements, or to low schemes of interest and convenience, in a matter where their own welfare, and the credit of religion are so deeply concerned. Let them seriously consider, how they will answer it to the great Creator, if they are guilty of this profane negligence in the choice of persons, whom they dedicate to his immediate service! To this very negligence may perhaps be imputed in part that general prejudice against the Clergy, which we have so fully described. For, as men seldom look beyond the present appearance, and are more disposed to censure, than to approve, while the eminent virtues of the many have escaped their attention, the faults of a few have been observed and scanned with a sharp-sighted rigour; nay, by an injustice, which no other class of men has ever experienced, those of individuals have been imputed to the order, and those of the order to each individual. How important, how awful then is the choice, on whatever side we view it, whether in reference to the parents, the children, the community, or the interests of mankind at large!

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The latter part of the text — “ and have peace one with another ” contains a distinct injunction, but connected with the former part. For the two chief causes, which affect the peace of religious societies, are *interest* and *opinion*; and the best defence against the mischiefs arising from either, is, purity of heart, and right apprehensions.

A great part of the divisions, which distracted the Church during the lives of the Apostles, and their immediate successors, were raised and fomented by *mercenary* men; whose real purpose was, to derive advantage to themselves from deceiving the people, they pretended to instruct. As our Saviour foretold their appearance, and described their character, nothing could be farther from his intention, than to recommend any union or intercourse with such persons.

But among the first converts to Christianity there was also a considerable number, both Jews and Heathens by descent, who, coming with sincere intentions, unfortunately brought with them a very strong attachment to particular parts of their ancient systems. To neglect those prejudices wholly, or combat them all on a sudden, would have been a measure harsh in itself, and unsuited to the state of a religion at it's first appearance. To indulge them without reserve or distinction, was unsafe; to distinguish, was invidious and offensive. The various, and interfering claims of the different converts produced frequent contests, and, with all their care and prudence, greatly disturbed the Apostles in the execution of their office.

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The difficulty of deciding those claims was sometimes such, as to cause disagreements between the Apostles themselves, firmly united as they were on all other occasions. The eager zeal of their successors in the work of conversion, increased this disorder. It was the opinion of some servile and pedantic instructors, that Christianity might be more effectually recommended to the great, if its doctrines were modelled to their taste, and fashioned to their philosophy. That opinion was adopted, and pursued. The consequence of such a compliance was natural. The simplicity and purity of the Gospel was soon lost in a scientific theology. The learners had no sound principles to rest upon: the teachers themselves had no settled plan. Sensible and pious persons were shocked at the introduction of such mixtures, and protested against them. But, by great misfortune, the chief managers in correcting such abuses, were, as it often happens, no wiser, and much worse men, than those, who introduced them;—were ambitious zealots, or ignorant enthusiasts. Hence the barbarous exclusion of all human learning; the sanguinary laws for the punishment of heretics; the multiplied rigours of tests and confessions; with all that bigotry, intolerance, and persecution, which arose from the conflicts of opposite opinions, and opened an entrance at last to Mahometan imposture, and Papal usurpation.

It might be expected at first sight, that those, who, by a spirited, unanimous, and persevering opposition, had succeeded

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at last in demolishing a bad system, would have acted with more concert in erecting a better. The event was not answerable to such an expectation. The leaders in this great undertaking divided into sects and parties, which differed so widely from each other, and even from themselves, that their conduct was turned with great art into a reproach upon their principles, and urged with great eloquence against the truth of their pretensions. But surely with little reason. For the same misfortune is common to their own, and to all Christian societies; nor have any felt it more severely than those, which were modelled by the Apostles themselves. Bodies of men, as well as individuals, are subject to great irregularities, often designing ill, when engaged in a virtuous cause; as often imprudent in conducting their designs, though right in themselves, and proceeding from the purest motives. But the truth or falsehood of principles has no dependence on the characters of men. We may lament that frailty, which, where there is an entire union of interests, so often excludes the union of inclinations. We may wish it were easier to prevent, or to reconcile, religious animosities; but when neither is possible, the differences however from which they arise, may be compared and distinguished; referred to their right cause, and reduced to their just value.

Thus, though the Protestants differed with each other in many particulars, they were chiefly abstruse, or ambiguous questions; — hard to decide, though not worth contesting.

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Their breach with the Church of Rome was on *other* grounds — on points, as important, as any in which man is concerned. Now a strict adherence to the essential doctrines of Christianity is a necessary *condition* of that peace, we are commanded to pursue. To depart from, dispense with, or alter, any real article of faith; to urge, or impose any thing, as such, which the scriptures neither avow, nor acknowledge, is fraud or folly; and as ministers, or as members of the Church, we cannot continue in communion with the authors or patrons of such abuses.

As perfection however is not to be looked for in any human institution, not every seeming, or every real defect in a religious service is sufficient to justify a separation. When this is the effect of a conceited confidence in our own understanding, or virtue; of a captious and censorious; or of a restless and discontented spirit, the precept that enjoins unity is unquestionably violated. How far any of our Protestant brethren, who dissent from the Church, come under this description, must be left to their own consciences, and to the great Searcher of hearts. However hardly they may think of us, so far from indulging any notions of them, not consistent with peace and charity; we honour the scruples of the honest and sincere in every persuasion.

I will only add, that although peace, with our utmost endeavours to preserve it, is not always in our power, yet a modest and peaceable disposition depends upon ourselves. And,

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to say nothing of its importance in other respects, without this quality we can neither be successful in the pursuit of truth, nor sincere in the profession of it. The violent, and conceited, of whatever persuasion, are certainly wrong. When such persons are appointed to teach religion, or assume to themselves that office, the effects of their temper are soon seen in the maxims they maintain, and the measures they pursue. They set up their own opinions in opposition to the authority of the Church; or by extending too far that authority, destroy the respect which is due to it. They attack vice in terms which confirm the profligate, and defend religion by methods, which disgrace it. They reject all human learning, as subversive of faith, or affect to be "learned above that which is written." Their whole conduct, indeed, is a train of inconsistencies. They reason carelessly, and decide magisterially. They doubt, with *sufficient* evidence, and believe, *without*, or *against* it. They give importance to trifles, and trifle in things of importance. The public tranquillity, which ought to be sacred, is sacrificed without scruple—to an unmeaning form, or unintelligible term. The great interests of mankind are abandoned for the promotion of some sordid end, or the maintenance of some frivolous notion: No charity, candour, or civility between persons of different persuasions; nay, between members of the same communion, and ministers of the same church. At that celebrated æra when religion was restored, the true temper of it was apparent in
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the opposers of the Romish doctrines; who disputed indeed with zeal and spirit, but were far from treating their avowed enemies, as many Authors have since treated their companions and brethren in Christ. Unpractised in the pert and petulant, unacquainted with the virulent and envenomed stile, they had still force enough for the defence of truth;—uniting the softness of persuasion with the severity of argument; and the meekness of the Christian character with the majesty of the philosophic spirit.

To conclude. The effect of religion when *pure* and *rational*, is to promote peace and happiness: but when enthusiastic or perverted, it renders discord more bitter, and error more pernicious. If the Clergy are *worldly*, or *divided*, the adversaries of religion will improve the opportunity. If they are *uncorrupt*, and *unanimous*, believers will be the more strongly confirmed in the faith, and infidels will examine with less prejudice the evidence upon which it is founded.

That our holy religion, through it's own transcendent purity, and the exemplary lives of those, who teach it, may triumph over all opposition, and unite in the same sentiments men of all denominations, let us implore the divine grace and assistance in the words of our liturgy.

O Lord, we beseech thee, let thy continual pity cleanse, and defend thy Church; and because it cannot continue in safety without thy succour, preserve it evermore by thy help and goodness, through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

